

TRAHERNE

(AN ESSAY)

BY

GLADYS E. WILLETT

CAMBRIDGE

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1919

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TRAHERNE.

I.

It seems almost a miracle that works of unmistakable genius should be rescued from oblivion two hundred years after the death of their author. Yet one of the greatest mystical writers of the seventeenth century was not discovered till 1897, when a fortunate chance led Mr. William Brooke to purchase two manuscripts of unknown authorship from a bookstall in Vigo Street. The manuscripts were sold to him for a few pence : both were in the same handwriting : one contained poetry, the other prose. On examining them, Mr. Brooke soon perceived that he had lighted on a treasure ; and he thought that the poems resembled the work of Henry Vaughan. He communicated his discovery to Dr. Grosart, who bought the two manuscripts, and intended to include the poems in a new edition of Vaughan, which he was preparing for the press. However, Dr. Grosart died before he could carry out his intention: his library was sold, and the manuscripts passed into the hands of the man to whom we owe the discovery of their true authorship—Bertram Dobell.

Dobell studied the manuscripts closely, and soon became convinced that Dr. Grosart was wrong in attributing them to Vaughan. By a strange coincidence, he had acquired a third manuscript volume from the sale of Dr. Grosart's library, which proved to be in the same handwriting as the other two, but did not throw any light on their mysterious author. It was a small volume of private devotions and prayers, and contained a few poems similar in style to those discovered by

Mr. Brooke. A better clue, however, was furnished by Mr. Brooke himself, who drew Dobell's attention to a poem called "The Ways of Wisdom", which he had found in a little book in the British Museum. The poem so closely resembled the poetry of the manuscripts that no one could help recognising it as the work of the same author. The volume containing it was entitled "A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same"; but the name of the writer of these "Thanksgivings" was not mentioned. Fortunately, however, a hint of his identity was given in the preface, which alluded to his having been chaplain to "the late Lord Keeper Bridgman." Dobell followed up this clue, and in Wood's "Athenae Oxonienses" he found the name of the Lord Keeper's Chaplain—Thomas Traherne.

Dobell now felt sure that Thomas Traherne was the unknown author of the manuscripts; and the information he found in the "Athenae Oxonienses" helped him to obtain yet more definite proofs. Wood stated that Traherne had published two books—"Roman Forgeries" and "Christian Ethics." Dobell consulted these works in the British Museum, and found a poem in the "Christian Ethics" which occurred in a slightly different form in one of the manuscripts.

Thus, when Dobell published the poems in 1903, and the prose "Centuries of Meditations" in 1908, he was able to assign them to their true author; and after a period of over two hundred years, Traherne has at last come into his own.

But this is not the end of the strange story. In 1910 Mr. H. I. Bell was searching among the Burney manuscripts in the British Museum for something in no way connected with Traherne. In the course of his investigations he came across a manuscript which bore the title, "Poems of Felicity, Vol. I., containing Divine Reflections on the Native Objects of an Infant Ey. By Tho. Traheron, B.D., Author of the Roman Forgeries

and Christian Ethiks." This collection contained not only the majority of the poems in Mr. Dobell's edition, but also thirty-eight new ones. The Burney manuscripts were acquired by the British Museum in 1818, and it is extraordinary that Traherne's poems should have lain there unnoticed for nearly a century. Mr. Bell edited the "Poems of Felicity" without delay ; they were published by the Clarendon Press ; and so yet another work of Thomas Traherne's was revealed to the world by a fortunate accident.

II.

We know little of the life of Thomas Traherne beyond the facts given in the "*Athenae Oxonienses*." He was probably born about 1636. Wood tells us that he was the son of a Hereford shoemaker, and was entered as a commoner of Brasenose College in 1652. He took his degree in due course, and became rector of the parish of Credenhill. Wood gives the date of his admission to the benefice as 1661, but Dobell has proved it to be 1657.

He proceeded Master of Arts in 1661, and Bachelor of Divinity in 1669. In 1667 he became private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgman, who was in that year made Lord Keeper of the Seals. Five years later, Bridgman was deprived of the seals, and retired to Teddington, whither Traherne accompanied him. Wood says that Traherne was minister of the parish of Teddington; but Dobell searched for his name in vain in a record of the curates of that parish. Sir Orlando Bridgman died on June 25th, 1674. Traherne survived his patron only a few months, and he was buried under the reading-desk in the church at Teddington on October 10th of the same year. A copy of his will is still in existence. He had only a few pounds to bequeath, and no property save his clothes and his books.

Wood mentions two theological works by Traherne—"Roman Forgeries" and "Christian Ethics." The former—a controversial treatise of no literary value—was published a year before Traherne died. The far more important "Christian Ethics" which was in the press at the time of his death, has suffered undeserved neglect from Traherne's own time up to the present day.

Besides the passage in the "*Athenae Oxonienses*", only two other references to Traherne have so far been discovered in the literature of the period. John Aubrey,

in his "Miscellanies", tells us that "Mr. Traherne, B.D., . . . a learned and sober person", once saw an apparition of one of his father's apprentices sitting by his bedside; and another time while lying in bed he saw a phantom basket of fruit. More important than Aubrey's anecdotes is the "Address to the Reader", written by a friend of Traherne's for the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God." This little book, which contains a series of thanksgivings in rhythmic prose, was not published till twenty-five years after the death of the author. The unknown friend gives us a valuable description of Traherne's character :—

"He was a Divine of the Church of England, of a very comprehensive Soul and very acute parts, so fully bent upon that honourable function in which he was engaged, and so wonderfully transported with the love of God to mankind . . . that he dwelt continually amongst these thoughts with great delight and satisfaction, spending most of his time when at home in digesting his notions of these things into writing, and was so full of them when abroad that those who would converse with him were forced to endure some discourse upon these subjects, whether they had any sense of religion or not. . . . He was a man of a cheerful and sprightly temper, free from anything of the sourness and formality by which some great pretenders to piety rather disparage and misrepresent true religion than recommend it; and therefore was very affable and pleasant in his conversation, ready to do all good offices to his friends, and charitable to the poor almost beyond his ability."

This attractive portrait, and Traherne's own account in the "Poems" and the "Centuries of Meditations", of his inner development from infancy to manhood compensate for our ignorance of the outer circumstances of his life. We can at any rate form a good idea of his personality, and it is, after all, more important that we should know what manner of man he was than that we should know the date and place of his birth.

III.

All mysticism is fundamentally the same—its essential characteristic being an ardent desire for union with God. But it expresses itself in different ways, according to the nature, nationality, and religion of the mystic, and the time in which he lives.

To understand Traherne aright, therefore, we should have some knowledge of other English mystics of the seventeenth century, particularly of those who belonged, as he did, to the Church of England. His mystical philosophy owes, indeed, more to his own temperament than to the thought of his time. Yet everyone depends in some measure on his environment; and to see Traherne in his proper setting, we must see him among his contemporaries.

Seventeenth century theology, except for Puritanism, had a very strong mystical tendency. Most of the great religious writers of the time are Anglicans; and their mysticism differs in many respects from that of their Roman Catholic predecessors. It expresses itself in more intellectual form. It is more active, and more bound up with the experiences of every day life: the Roman Catholic mystic tends to shut himself from the world, and wait in passive contemplation for the visits of his "Divine Lover": the Anglican seeks his Lord in everything, and would fain "take the kingdom of Heaven by storm." This difference lies partly in the very nature of the two religions; but in the seventeenth century we have also to reckon with the influence of Neo-Platonic philosophy on Anglicanism. Already in the Elizabethan period we find Spenser blending the teaching of Plato

with Christianity. In the seventeenth century, the Neo-Platonic mystics were read even more eagerly than Plato himself; and they helped many broad-minded theologians of the day to a fuller understanding of the Christian doctrines. The study of the Neo-Platonists not only favoured the spread of mysticism in the Church of England but also gave that mysticism a distinct intellectual and philosophical bias.

We may divide the seventeenth century mystics into two main groups—the sacred poets of the school of Donne, and the religious philosophers of the type of the “Cambridge Platonists.”

The sacred lyric rose to a perfection in this period which it has never since attained; and of all the religious poets worthy of the name, only the greatest genius of the age—Milton—remains quite untouched by mysticism. The mystical poets trace their spiritual descent from John Donne, who in his “Divine Poems” unites a Platonic trend of thought with a passionate faith in Christianity. His chief followers are Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, and Traherne. George Herbert was Donne’s friend and disciple: his “Temple” shows clear traces of the influence of Donne’s style, and has all the emotional intensity of the “Divine Poems”, but little of their philosophic thought. The sacred verse of Richard Crashaw seems to have been inspired by the “Temple” in the first place, and he has Donne’s and Herbert’s fondness for “conceits”; but all his best poems take their colouring from the Roman Catholic religion, and he stands somewhat apart from his Anglican brethren. Henry Vaughan, on the other hand, deliberately imitates Herbert, borrowing his thoughts and imagery, and sometimes even his very words. Yet Vaughan is never insincere, never a mere dishonest plagiarist: he has much in common with Herbert, and loves the “Temple” so well that he naturally falls into the same style when he treats the same subjects. But he can also write in a different vein. He was more of a Platonic philosopher

than Herbert : he had a more genuinely mystical temperament ; and he was also a greater man. He does not write only of his personal experiences : his finest poems have a deeper and more universal significance than any in the "Temple." He has certain conceptions in common with Traherne which have led to the supposition that Traherne imitated him. Traherne certainly resembles Vaughan more than he does the other mystical poets ; but this is not saying much. We can trace Donne in Herbert, and Herbert in Vaughan : we cannot trace any of the three definitely in Traherne. He is less lyrical and more philosophical than the rest of the school of Donne ; and his thought was probably influenced by the "Cambridge Platonists"—or philosophers like them—rather than by his fellow poets.

The group of theologians known as the "Cambridge Platonists" were living and writing at Cambridge University about the middle of the seventeenth century. The most important of them are John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More. They are all prose-writers. More alone attempted verse as well as prose ; but his efforts can hardly be called poetry. The "Cambridge Platonists", unlike the mystical poets, are controversial and didactic. On the one hand they fight against the empty dogmatism of some of their fellow Churchmen, seeking to show that scientific discovery confirms rather than contradicts true religion, that faith and reason may be united, and that Christianity should consist in universal charity, rather than in a set of dogmas : at the same time the Platonists are up in arms against materialism and atheism. John Smith and Henry More declare that we have within ourselves undoubted proof of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God ; for the wonderful powers of our spirit prove its independence of matter, and our intellectual conceptions of eternity and infinity, our instinctive longing for perfect good and perfect beauty, testify to the existence of a Deity Who possesses these qualities.

Cudworth and More both wrote after the publication of Hobbes' "Leviathan", and seek to confute it in their work, endeavouring to show that spirit, not matter, is the foundation of the Universe. And though the Cambridge Platonists value the human intellect, higher than it they rate "Divine sagacity." "That is not the best and truest knowledge of God which is wrought by the labour and sweat of the brain", says John Smith, "but that which is kindled within us by a heavenly warmth in our hearts." Plotinus has this idea of a divine faculty in man which intuitively recognises Truth ; and it is on Neo-Platonic mystic thought that the Cambridge theologians ground their transcendental philosophy. On the whole their mysticism seems more a matter of intellectual conception and less one of personal experience than the mysticism of the seventeenth century poets. In Henry More, however, we have a genuine mystic and visionary ; but unfortunately he did not possess the literary skill to make his vision clear to others. It should always be borne in mind that ideas alone cannot make a mystic : he must be emotional as well as theoretical ; and many of the Cambridge Platonists seem to have the thoughts, but not the feelings, of mysticism.

The Neo-Platonic tendency in theology was by no means confined to Cambridge, though there we find its most important manifestation. Traherne, we know, was at Oxford, and very likely came under the influence, not of the Cambridge Platonists themselves, but of a similar school of theologians at the sister University. Mysticism was in the air at the time : certain ideas were widespread throughout the country ; and we know Traherne must have been affected by those ideas, though we cannot tell exactly where he came into contact with them.

Mysticism of all ages and all countries has taught that, on the one hand, the universe emanates from God, and, on the other, God Himself is immanent in the

universe. Some mystics embrace only one or the other belief; but the greatest of them adopt both, and find God both without and within: He is transcendent in the world; and yet it exists in Him, and He in it. So, too, the seventeenth century mystics sometimes look upon God as the Creator, sometimes as Him "in Whom we live and move and have our being", Who is, as Donne puts it, "That All, which always is all, everywhere."

With these conceptions of the Divine Being the belief in the pre-existence of the soul is closely connected. Plato taught that the soul had existed from eternity in a world of ideas. His teaching was later united with that of the emanation of all things from God; and it was said that, since our spirits originally came from God, they must, as a part of Him, have had eternal existence. Some of the seventeenth century writers keep this creed in the somewhat vague form of everything being the idea of God, and consequently having everlasting existence in His Mind. Thus Donne in "La Corona", writes of the Virgin Mary:—

"Ere by the spheres time was created, thou
Wast in His Mind, Who is thy Son and Brother,
Whom thou conceivest, conceived: yea, thou art now
Thy Maker's maker and thy Father's Mother."

Sir Thomas Browne, who has a distinctly mystical trend of thought, expresses a similar idea in "Religio Medici"; and we find it also in Traherne's "Centuries of Meditations." But Vaughan and Henry More believe in a former life of a more definite kind: God is our true home, they say; and in the midst of our present banishment we remember Him and long to return. In one of his quaint metaphysical poems, More says that our souls were once a part of the Divine Being, but that we fell away from Him, through our desire for independence:—

/' Uncent'ring ourselves from that Great Stay,
Which fondly we new liberty did ween,
And from that prank right jolly wights ourselves did deem."

With Vaughan, this creed arose less from a philosophical conception than from a feeling of intense home-sickness for some better world :—

“ As birds robbed of their native wood,
Although their diet may be fine,
Yet neither sing, nor like their food,
But with the thought of home do pine,
So do I mourn and hang my head ;
And though Thou dost me fulness give,
Yet look I for far better bread
Because by this man cannot live.”

A wistful regret for some lost happiness pervades all Vaughan's sacred poetry. He has brief flashes of insight into the mystery of existence ; but all too soon the light has gone from him again, and he is left mourning. He feels that he was nearer his true home in his “angel infancy” before he had grown accustomed to this world :—

“ When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back at that short space
Could see a glimpse of His bright face
When on some gilded cloud or flow'r
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity.”

This recollection of the divine intuitions of childhood is the chief connecting link between Vaughan and Traherne. Wordsworth expresses a similar thought in his “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality” ; and, curiously enough, he has more in common with his two seventeenth century predecessors (though of Traherne he could know nothing) than either of them has with the other.

The philosophical conception of union with God may have come to seventeenth century mysticism through the Neo-Platonists ; but the actual desire for it is deeply implanted in every mystic ; and such alone among men

have the power to attain a partial union even in this life. John Smith declares that humanity reaches its highest level in the "true metaphysical and contemplative man", who escapes from himself by "universal love and holy affection", till he reaches the nearest union with God possible in our present existence. Vaughan expresses the same idea very beautifully in his poem, "The World" :—

" I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light
All calm, as it was bright ;
And round beneath it, time in hours, days, years,
Driv'n by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow mov'd, in which the world
And all her train were hurl'd."

The poet sees various types of men in the world, for the most part engaged in sordid occupations :—

" Yet some, who all this while did weep and sing,
And sing and weep, soared up into the ring ;
But most would use no wing."

He wonders at the folly of those who make no attempt to reach the light :—

" But as I did their madness so discuss,
One whispered thus :
|| This ring the Bridegroom did for none provide
| But for the bride."

Vaughan himself was one of those who could soar up into the ring, but more often he sings and weeps; and, indeed, as Henry More points out, perfect reunion with God cannot be gained till after death. Hence that passionate longing for death which characterises the sacred poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan.

From the idea that all things come from God springs the conviction of a spiritual unity underlying all matter. We find this conviction in many of the seventeenth century mystics.

Ralph Cudworth holds that there is an unconscious

spirit animating the universe and fulfilling the will of the Creator. "Plastic Nature", as he calls it, cannot think or feel; yet it is a living thing, and in no way mechanical. Henry More also believes in a spirit of Nature. We find the same idea in Vaughan, taking a more emotional, less philosophical, form. He feels a strong bond of sympathy with the rest of creation: Nature seems to him to be awaiting with man the day of redemption. Unlike the Platonists, he endows Nature with a kind of instinctive feeling; and he frequently contrasts her steady expectancy of God's coming with the inconstant waywardness of mankind. All creatures sing hymns of praise to their Lord, he says, and intuitively strive to reach Him: man alone is ever forgetting God:—

"Sometimes I sit with Thee, and tarry
An hour or so, then vary.
Thy other creatures on this scene
Thee only aim and mean:
Some rise to seek Thee, and with heads
Erect, peep from their beds.
Others, whose birth is in the tomb
And cannot quit the womb,
Sigh there and groan for Thee,
Their liberty."

Such a view of Nature seems to exclude God from Omnipresence, but does not really do so, for man, too, lives in exile from the Divine Essence, of which he is, notwithstanding, a part. And Vaughan sees traces of God everywhere. After describing in one of his poems how a hidden seed inspired him with thoughts of immortality, he prays:—

"Grant I may so
Thy steps track here below
That in these masques and shadows I may see
Thy sacred way;
And by those hid ascents climb to that day
Which breaks from Thee
Who art in all things, though invisibly."

Vaughan has not quite that "sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused", which in Wordsworth and other "Nature-mystics" approaches very near to Pantheism. The material world seems to Vaughan to be symbolic of eternal truth ; and he draws parables from it. Here again he is akin to Traherne, who also sees truth in physical nature, though in rather a less imaginative and more matter-of-fact way.

The fondness for symbolism characterises not only the "Nature-mystics", but mystics in general. For they almost always look upon the different manifestations of the world as the expression of one Divine idea, and consequently perceive hidden resemblances between things which are on the surface dissimilar. Besides, the mystic finds it easier to convey his deepest thoughts and feelings by metaphorical than by abstract language, and this quality he has in common with the poet. The union of the poetic and the mystic temperament in Donne no doubt accounts for his lavish use of conceits. Sometimes his metaphors have true imaginative beauty; but at other times, as Johnson says, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." Though Donne makes them pass muster by sheer force of character, and very seldom becomes ludicrous, his example was a pitfall to his followers, to whom such extravagances were not natural. In Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw, side by side with the most beautiful symbolism, we find conceits which reach the climax of tastelessness and absurdity. Traherne manifests his independence and good sense by not following the fashion for far-fetched metaphor. That he makes so little use of more legitimate symbolism is, however, to be regretted.

Christian mystics have a special tendency to express their desire for God symbolically, in language appropriate to earthly love. Christianity teaches that God is Love, and that it is our highest duty to love Him. Seventeenth century theology—influenced partly, no doubt,

by Plotinus' conception of the Trinity—placed a deep mystic interpretation on the Church doctrine of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father was, for them, the Creative source of all things ; the Holy Spirit, the Divine spark in the human soul ; the Son, the bridge and mediator between the two. Only through Christ, they say, can the Divine in us become united with the Divine outside us. Henry More, in his poem "Psychozoia", associates Plotinus' Trinity of the Good, the Intellect, and the Soul with the Christian Trinity, and relates in an allegory how God the Good marries His Son the Intellect to His Daughter the Soul. Roman Catholic mystics long before the seventeenth century had looked upon Christ as the Lover of the Soul, and had uttered their spiritual experiences in a metaphor of sexual love. Richard Crashaw carries on this tradition in the seventeenth century ; but he makes it too much of the earth, earthy ; and we may well suspect him of being a sentimentalist rather than a genuine mystic. In Donne and Herbert we find "love-mysticism" of a far more spiritual type, warmly personal and tender, yet devoid of sensuousness. Donne, in the beautiful "Hymn to Christ", addresses his Lord as he might a dearly-loved human being :—

"Nor Thou nor Thy religion dost control
 The amorousness of an harmonious soul :
 But Thou wouldst have that love Thyself : as Thou
 Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now :
 Thou lovest not, till from loving more Thou free
 My soul : whoever gives, takes liberty :
 O, if Thou carest not whom I love,
 Alas ! Thou lovest not me."

Still more lovingly intimate is the poetry of Herbert. His earlier poems all bear evidence of spiritual conflict : he was a man who loved the good things of this life, yet he was at heart a mystic : sometimes the longing for worldly fame and prosperity was uppermost, sometimes

the burning desire for union with God. He had very human moods of doubt and depression when his beloved Lord seemed to have deserted him :—

“ Whither, O whither art Thou fled,
My Lord, my Love ?
My searches are my daily bread,
Yet never prove.

My knees pierce the earth, mine eyes the sky ;
And yet the sphere
And centre both to me deny
That Thou art there.

Yet I can mark how herbs below
Grow green and gay,
As if to meet Thee they did know,
While I decay.

.

When Thou dost turn and wilt be near,
What edge so keen,
What point so piercing can appear
To come between ?

For as Thy absence doth excel
All distance known,
So doth Thy nearness bear the bell
Making two one.”

All mystics in the earlier stages of their development sometimes have this feeling of being shut off from God. Although they know that God is everywhere, their sins seem to come between them and His perfection, so that they cannot find Him. Vaughan has similar moods of despair. Sometimes, however, it seems to the mystic as though he were not the seeker, but the sought for: Christ tries to gain his unwilling soul with infinite love and infinite patience. The author of the old poem “Quia Amore Languet” has this idea in his mind : so,

too, has Francis Thompson in "The Hound of Heaven." Herbert expresses it in the poem "Christmas":—

"All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I both tired, body and mind,
With full cry of affections, quite astray,
I took up in the next inn I could find.
There, when I came, whom found I but my dear,
My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to Him, ready there
To be all passengers' most sweet relief"?

And his beautiful poems "Dialogue" and "Love" express the same idea, which does not in any way contradict the feeling of God being afar off, and man having to search for Him. For man is too imperfect to approach the Divine Essence without a long and painful struggle; he cannot obtain the pearl of great price unless he be willing to pay for it. And yet however often he refuse in his folly to buy that pearl, Infinite Love will not let him forget it, but will ever be offering it to him.

There is something of the "love-mystic" in Traherne, just as there is something of the "nature-mystic", and something of the Neo-Platonic philosopher. He comes rather late in the history of seventeenth century mysticism. Donne lived from (1573 to 1631); Herbert from (1593 to 1633); Vaughan from (1621 to 1695.) The Cambridge Platonists, for the most part, were writing about the middle of the seventeenth century. Traherne was born about 1636, and died in 1674; and probably the greater part of his work was written in the last years of his life. By that time the mystical movement was on the wane. Traherne reflects the general spirit of the movement rather than any particular side of it. He absorbed the thought of his contemporaries and predecessors in such a way that it became a part of himself, and we cannot say "This is his; that is theirs." On the foundation laid for him by others he built up a mystical philosophy of his own—a philosophy of great beauty and originality, bearing witness to the nobility of its maker.

IV.

Traherne's true medium was prose, not verse : there is hardly a thought in his poems which he has not expressed far more finely in the "Centuries of Meditations." Metre and rhyme did not help his genius, but hampered it. Yet there are occasional flashes of inspiration in his poetry, and even in its less inspired moments it has a quaint charm all its own.

Mr. Bell has shown, in his introduction to the "Poems of Felicity", that the two manuscripts so far discovered do not exhaust Traherne's poetical works. The most interesting point to notice in connection with the manuscripts we possess is that Burney MS. 392 (which represents an edition of the poems prepared for the press, though for some reason never published) in many cases gives a different version from that found in the Dobell MS. The question naturally arises—are these alterations due to Traherne himself or not ? The Dobell MS. is probably in Traherne's own handwriting : the Burney MS. certainly in that of his brother Philip. From the dedicatory verses written by Philip to the "Poems of Felicity", we know that he prepared them for the press some time after the death of Thomas Traherne. Mr. Bell thinks "the most likely inference is that the original text (in the main), and perhaps some of the corrections, are due to Thomas Traherne ; but that in preparing the volume for the press, Philip did not scruple to revise and alter the text wherever he thought that correction was called for." Yet one would prefer to attribute the main alterations to Philip, who does not

appear, from his dedicatory verses, to have been much of a poet, for in nine cases out of ten the text of the Burney MS., though more correct, is far less imaginative. Thus, in the poem "Nature", it gives :—

"As soon as He my spirit did inspire,
His works He bid me in the world admire";

instead of the far finer couplet in the Dobell MS. :—

"The very day my spirit did inspire,
The world's fair beauty set my soul on fire."

In the case of "The Approach" we possess yet a third version of the poem, which appears in the "Centuries of Meditations." The Burney MS. gives, as usual, an alteration for the worse :—

"Now in this world I Him discern,
And what His dealings with me I meant to learn,
He sow'd in me seeds of delights,
That might grow up to future benefits";

instead of :—

"Now in this world I Him behold,
And me, enveloped in more than gold;
In deep abysses of delight,
In present hidden precious benefits."

It is an interesting point, not noticed by Mr. Bell, that the text given in the "Centuries of Meditations" is obviously based on the version of the Dobell MS. If Traherne was really writing the "Centuries" at the time of his death, as Bertram Dobell assumes, it seems likely that in this case, at any rate, the Burney MS. either represents an early version of "The Approach", later rejected by the poet, or else an altered text made by Philip, not Thomas, Traherne.

Practically all Traherne's poetry is inspired by his belief in the "divine intuitions" of his infancy. When he was a child, he tells us, his soul was to him his "only

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all", "a living endless eye", which saw the whole world clothed in glory :—

" I felt a vigour in my sense
That was all spirit : I within did flow
With seas of life, like wine.
I nothing in the world did know
But 'twas Divine.

.

The streets were paved with golden stones,
The boys and girls were mine.
Oh, how did all their lovely faces shine !
The sons of men were holy ones :
In joy and beauty they appeared to me ;
And everything which here I found,
While like an angel I did see,
Adorned the ground."

He loved the sun, the stars, the skies, the fields, and, above all, his fellow-men : the "world as God hath made it" filled him with wonder; but all the worthless treasures of civilisation, gold and jewels, rich robes and crowns, were nothing to him. The whole universe was his in those days : he did not envy the possessions of others, for what was theirs seemed his also. He knew nothing of "sins, griefs, complaints, dissensions, weeping eyes." But as he grew older he gradually became contaminated by the materialism around him, and learned to worship false gods. Moreover, he lost his innocence, and discovered the meaning of sin and misery. The glory had departed from creation. Yet all the time he knew that such a thing as happiness existed, if he could but find it, and he searched for it unceasingly :—

" In ev'ry house I sought for health,
Searched every cabinet to spy my wealth :
I knocked at every door ;
Asked every man I met for bliss ;
In every school and college sought for this,
But still was destitute and poor."

At last he regained his lost "felicity" through religious meditation. His realisation of the love of God led him in the same direction as the intuitions of his infancy; and in the light of his mystical philosophy the world appeared bright and glorious once more. As he tells us in the "Review" he had come,

"from God's works to think upon
The thoughts of men";

but his philosophy was largely dependent on his memories of childhood :—

"Those thoughts His goodness long before
Prepared as precious and celestial store
With curious art in me inlaid,
That childhood might itself alone be said
My tutor, teacher, guide to be,
Instructed then even by the Deity."

In his conviction of the infinite love of God, Traherne resembles the other mystical poets. But he very seldom strikes the personal note of Donne and Herbert, though we find it in the ecstatic lyric "Love", and in a few poems like "The Approach" and "Another", where Traherne imagines God wooing the human soul :—

"He courts our love with infinite esteem,
And seeks it so that it doth almost seem
Even all His blessedness. His love doth prize
It as the only sacrifice.

.

'Tis death, my soul, to be indifferent.
Set forth thyself unto thy whole extent,
And all the glory of His passion prize
Who for thee lives, who for thee dies."

More often, Traherne dwells on the mystic nature of God in the manner of the "Cambridge Platonists": the Deity is "the fountain, means and end" of all things: "His essence is all act", and therefore His infinite love had to express itself in an "act of loving", whereby He

created the universe. Most characteristic of all are the passages in which Traherne writes of the love of God as it is expressed in His works, and here again he takes an original point of view. God, he says, created the universe for man, and can only enjoy it through man. If we do not love the heaven and the earth and our fellow-men, and if we do not love and praise God for giving them to us, we deny Him, and He is

"despised and defied

Undeified almost, if once denied."

God's happiness is to see us happy, but we can be truly happy only if we love God and all creation. Since sin came into the world, "man has lost the ancient way", and seeks his felicity in the wrong direction.

(Traherne, like Donne and Sir Thomas Browne, sometimes alludes to all things having existed from eternity, in the mind of God. This abstract philosophical conception does not, however, constitute a definite belief in the pre-existence of the soul. On the contrary, Traherne takes the Bible story of Adam and Eve quite literally : he believes that God made man in His image out of nothing, and he ascribes all the sin and sorrow in the world to the fatal apple. Consequently he cannot, like Vaughan, explain the intuitions of childhood by assuming them to be recollections of a former life. The doctrine of original sin does not support his belief in a child's instinctive knowledge of the "ancient way"; and Traherne is at a loss to account for his early innocence :—

"Whether it be that Nature is so pure
And custom only vicious ; or that sure
God did by miracle the guilt remove,
And made my soul to feel His love

So early ; or that 'twas one day,
Wherein this happiness I found." . . .

However that may be, Traherne feels that he possessed the secret of happiness in his infancy, because he saw

the world in a Divine light. For he lays particular stress on the fact that our happiness cannot come to us from without : even Heaven itself comes from within :—

“ ’Tis not the object, but the light
That maketh Heaven ; ’tis a purer sight ” ;

and again :—

“ He that cannot like an angel see
In Heaven itself shall dwell in misery.”

Bertram Dobell says that Traherne was “a Berkleian before Berkley was born” ; for though he never actually affirms “the non-existence of independent matter”, he is constantly hinting that things receive all their qualities from thought :—

“ Thought ! Surely thoughts are true,
They please as much as things can do ;
Nay, things are dead,
And in themselves are severed
From souls ; nor can they fill the head
Without our thoughts. Thoughts are the real things,
From whence all joy, from whence all sorrow springs.”

Like the “Cambridge Platonists”, he frequently asserts the superiority of spirit over matter. Our thoughts, he says, are all-powerful : they are not dependent on time and space. Through them we still have “yesterday’s yet-present blessedness” : through them we can anticipate our future joys. They can journey into all ages and all kingdoms, and through them man has the power to love what he has never seen. It is our thoughts which we must give to God, for He esteems them “more than worlds.” In the poem “Insatiableness” Traherne finds the proof of God’s existence where John Smith and Henry More found it—in the vast conceptions and boundless desires of the human soul, which can be satisfied only by something infinite and eternal.

Traherne is a great thinker, but that does not make him a great poet. Dobell’s assertion, that in “the most essential qualities of a poet” he surpasses Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw, has had no support from later

criticism. On the contrary, it is just in those "most essential qualities" that he is inferior to them. He avoids many of their worst faults : his natural hatred of artificiality prevents him from using absurd conceits, and he amply justifies his claim in "The Author to the Critical Peruser" that his verse contains no "curling metaphors" or "things that amaze, but do not make us wise." His versification is sometimes faulty, but not more so than that of Herbert and Vaughan. Yet the fact remains that Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw can give full expression to their genius in verse, and Traherne cannot. He is always something of an amateur. He fills out his metre with "do" and "did" : he twists sentences the wrong way round : he is too fond of exclamatory phrases and strings of nouns : he uses the hymes "treasure" and "pleasure" till they begin to irritate the reader. His genuinely imaginative temperament is fettered, because he has no real command of his medium. That he really possesses the poetic imagination, we cannot doubt : every now and then it breaks through the bonds of rhyme and metre in a flash of real beauty. Sometimes Traherne can rise to the sublime simplicity often found in Wordsworth :—

" No ear

But eyes themselves were all the hearers there,
And every stone, and every star a tongue,
And every gale of wind a curious song.
The heavens were an oracle, and spake
Divinity : the earth did undertake
The office of a priest ; and I being dumb—
Nothing besides was dumb—all things did come
With voices and instructions ; but when I
Had gained a tongue, their power began to die."

His metaphors and similes are not only simple and to the point, but often very poetic :—

" Drowned in their customs, I became
A stranger to the shining skies,
Lost as a dying flame."

But Traherne very seldom maintains this high level for any length of time. Perhaps the best sustained of all his poems is "The Salutation" : here we find no lapses into doggerel, and few poets have written so well of the entrance of the spirit into the world :—

" From dust I rise,
And out of nothing now awake :
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes
A gift from God I take :
The earth, the seas, the light, the lofty skies,
The sun and stars are mine, if these I prize.

A stranger here
Strange things doth meet, strange glory see :
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,
Strange all, and new to me ;
But that they mine should be, who nothing was,
That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass."

Birth is a very great mystery, whatever theories one may have about the soul ; and Traherne makes us feel the wonder of it all in "The Salutation." He is at his best when the lyrical impulse gets the better of him, as here and in the poem "Love", the two last verses of which are very beautiful. Unfortunately the didactic tendency frequently overcomes the lyrical : Traherne had a message to convey to the world, and wrote with a purpose ; and when he is reasoning rather than feeling his inspiration deserts him.

Traherne has a stronger personality than any of the mystical poets save Donne. Like Donne, he is always completely himself. He has a far less complex nature, and consequently also far less variety : the same ideas, the same words, the same imagery meet us over and over again. But the quaintness and originality of his thought and language give an attraction to everything he writes. Who but Traherne could have written poems like "Shadows in the Water", or "Leaping over the Moon", or "Poverty" ? We can enjoy even his weaker

poems, because they are so exactly like him—every bit as characteristic in their way as the better ones. He may imitate himself, but he never imitates anybody else.

There are some who deny this very originality of Traherne's. A writer in the "Athenaeum" of August 1903 declares that "ecstasy and originality are markedly lacking" from Traherne's work, and that he has taken his idea of the intuitions of infancy bodily out of Vaughan. Few critics go quite so far as this, but many hint that Traherne's debt to Vaughan is by no means a small one. It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that Traherne was in no way influenced by men of his age. He has the tendency to unite Platonism with Christianity, which we find in Vaughan and in many of the Cambridge theologians: he probably borrowed part of his Platonic thought from them, or from men like them, though he applies it in his own way. He may have modelled his versification on that of Vaughan. His favourite metres are the heroic couplet and the long stanza with lines of varying length arranged on a somewhat complicated plan. Both metres are used by Vaughan, but particularly the latter, which Traherne may very well have inherited from him, as he inherited it from Herbert. But in other respects there is very little resemblance between Vaughan and Traherne. They are not at all alike in temperament: one has only to compare Vaughan's "The True Christmas" with Traherne's poem "On Christmas Day" to see the fundamental difference between them: Vaughan feels the need for grief and repentance, Traherne the need for joy. There is no foundation for supposing that Traherne borrowed his idea of the glory of childhood from Vaughan. Vaughan expresses his regret for his lost infancy in three poems only—"The Retreat", "Childhood", and "Looking Back"—and he seems to have only a vague memory of those early days. Traherne, on the other hand, bases nearly all his poetry on this one theme, and he gives a circumstantial account of his childhood in the "Centuries",

which bears out the allusions in the poems in every detail. To suppose that he invented the story of his early life would be, on the face of it, absurd. He could have made it far more wonderful if it had not been true : besides, he is obviously sincerity itself. It is not even very likely that Vaughan's poetry opened Traherne's eyes for the first time to his own early intuitions. The two poets have an entirely different attitude towards their childhood. Vaughan thinks that he had still some memory of the higher world whence he came; and thus accounts for the glory of his infancy : Traherne cannot account for it at all: he simply states it as a fact, and builds up his whole creed on it. Vaughan is full of regret for what he has lost : Traherne, with characteristic optimism, regards his childish intuitions as an ever-present source of joy. He reminds us of Wordsworth, in whom "perpetual benediction" was bred :—

— " For those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet the master light of all our seeing."

Indeed, Traherne has more in common with Wordsworth than with Vaughan : he, too, found compensation for the loss of that first "celestial light" in "years that bring the philosophic mind." Sympathy of thought can exist between two great writers without one having borrowed from the other. The truth is that most people consider it merely a fanciful notion to attribute divine intuitions to a child, and cannot conceive that so strange an idea should have struck two men independently. Yet even ordinary children sometimes seem to have a strange instinct for the great truths. That this instinct should have been possessed in a far higher degree by Vaughan and Traherne in their early years can scarcely surprise us, and we have no real need to doubt the actuality of their experience.

TRAHERNE

V.

Three of Traherne's works were published during the seventeenth century—"Roman Forgeries", "Christian Ethics", and "A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God." There are copies of these books in the British Museum and in other libraries, but they had been long since forgotten when the discovery of Traherne's more important writings revived an interest in them.

The "Roman Forgeries" were published in 1673. The most entertaining part of the book is the "AdVERTISEMENT to the Reader", in which Traherne gives a lively account of a dispute between himself and a Roman Catholic acquaintance. Traherne offered to prove that all the ancient records of his opponent's Church were forgeries: to his astonishment and indignation, the only reply was "What hurt is that to the Church of Rome?" He concludes the story thus:—

"'No!' cried I amazed. 'Is it no hurt to the Church of Rome to be found guilty of forging Canons in the apostles' names, and Epistles in the Fathers' names, which they have never made? Is it nothing in Rome to be guilty of counterfeiting Decrees and Councils and records of Antiquity? *I have done with you!*' Whereupon I turned from him, as from an obdurate person."

The main part of the book has no interest as literature. Traherne throws himself into his task with his usual whole-hearted enthusiasm. But he is so bent on proving all the "forgeries" of Roman Catholicism, that the work consists simply of a dull string of facts about Fathers and Councils. His anxiety to score his point

prevents him from touching upon themes of more universal interest : consequently the general reader, for whom theological controversy has in itself no attraction, finds the "Roman Forgeries" wearisome in the extreme.

"Christian Ethics" is a more valuable work. It appeared in 1674, and a notice inserted by the publisher begs the reader to excuse all misprints, owing to "the author's much lamented death happening immediately after this copy came to the press." Bertram Dobell points out that "Christian Ethics" is a far rarer book than "Roman Forgeries." It would seem, therefore, that it enjoyed less success at the time—no doubt because neither the author nor his patron, Sir Orlando Bridgman, lived to pilot it into the world. In an "Address to the Reader," Traherne explains the object of his book, which is to lead men to happiness by way of virtue. He warns us that we may meet with some "new notions", but begs us to believe that they are in no way contradictory to the Catholic faith, and that he himself speaks "from the actual knowledge of true Felicity." He feels that "true Felicity" lies in loving God and all His works. "You may easily discern", he says, "that my design is to reconcile men to God, and make them fit to delight in Him, and that my last end is to celebrate His praises, in communion with the angels. Wherein I beg the concurrence of the reader ; for we can never praise Him enough, nor be fit enough to praise Him."

Traherne sets out, therefore, with a sublime object in view, but unfortunately the means he uses to attain it are of his age and not for all time. He introduces his ethical system quite well in the first two chapters of the book by telling us that "felicity" is our end in life, and virtue the only means to that end, and then explaining what he means by "felicity." But his subsequent enumeration and classification of all the virtues has no interest for the modern reader. He divides them in a more or less arbitrary manner, under the headings "theological", "intellectual", "moral", and "Divine";

and then proceeds to classify them anew, telling us "what virtues pertain to the estate of innocency, what to the estate of grace, what to the estate of glory." The rest of the book is devoted to discussing the "nature" and "objects" of each particular virtue in turn. It is a pity that Traherne chose to clothe his wisdom in this learned apparel : the wisdom itself is ever new, but the garment is out of fashion. Even if the "Christian Ethics" were republished, as some people have wished it to be, it would hardly find a large public to-day. Yet the book contains plenty of beautiful and interesting passages, if one has the patience to seek them out, and it also has the merit of throwing new light on the character of Traherne.

The majority of readers after studying Traherne's "Poems" would probably put their author down as a man who had lofty ideals and great spiritual insight, but no knowledge of the world. Yet the "Christian Ethics" shows that he was not merely an absent-minded dreamer. More than once he gives evidence of practical common-sense and close observation of human nature. For instance, he points out that the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" principle is not only unchristian, but useless :—"He that revenges an injury seems to do one. For he that did the wrong, seems innocent to himself, and seeming innocent takes the revenge as an undeserved injury. . . . If wild-fire be thrown, I will put it out with my foot, and not by throwing it back give my enemy the advantage of retorting it upon me." Traherne combines with his idealism a remarkably sane and well-balanced mind, which never rushes to extremes. Thus in the chapter on "Liberality" he says it is mere folly to give away all one's substance, since it deprives one of the power of doing good in the future; and he gives a practical rule for the regulation of charity : "Let thy superfluities give place to other men's conveniences, thy conveniences to their necessities, thy necessities to their extremities." He always takes the moderate point of

view ; in the first chapter of the "Ethics" he tells us :—

" I am not so stoical as to make all felicity consist in a mere apathy or freedom from passion, nor yet so dissolute as to give the passions all their liberty. Neither do I persuade you to renounce the advantages of wealth and honour, any more than those of beauty and wit; for, as a man may be happy without all these, so he may make a happy use of them when he has them."

Traherne has no motive of self-interest in defending worldly prosperity ; for we know that he did not have the "advantages of wealth and honour." A little later in the same chapter he tells us that "sometimes it is requisite to forfeit all for the sake of felicity"; and it would seem from a passage in the "Centuries of Meditations" that he himself voluntarily forfeited all. His consecration of his whole life to the pursuit of an ideal is all the more splendid because he was no fanatic. Another aspect of Traherne, which appears more fully in the "Christian Ethics" than in the "Poems", is his courageous attitude towards the difficulties and temptations of life. In the "Poems" he says very little about the thorns which grow in the path to "felicity"; and we are led to think that he is not human enough to notice them. But in the "Ethics" he tells us that we must be prepared to "endure all afflictions that can befall us":—

" For this purpose we are to remember that our present estate is not that of reward, but labour . . . a condition wherein we are to toil, and sweat, and travail hard for the promised wages . . . a real warfare, in order to a glorious victory, in which we are to expect some blows, and delight in the hazards and encounters we meet with, because they will be crowned with a glorious and joyful triumph."

Here and in the fine chapter on "Courage" he shows that he rejoices in the battle of life : he is glad to have something to fight against. This is just the reverse of the Puritan attitude towards temptation. Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress" struggles bravely enough, but he is always on the defensive, and takes no active

pleasure in conquest. The religion of Traherne is founded on love, the religion of the Puritans on duty. Traherne believes that even courage avails nothing without love : he calls love the life and soul of every virtue, and virtue no longer seems harsh and austere where love is the motive. For this reason he declares :—

“ Whatsoever the soul does not desire and delight in, though the matter of the performance be never so excellent, the manner is spoiled and totally blasted.”

Traherne feels that man should be prompted to do right by love of God and love of humanity—not merely by the dictates of conscience.

He does not attack the Puritans in the “Christian Ethics”, though his creed is the antithesis of theirs. He probably realised that they were trying to reach “felicity” in their own way. Materialism, on the other hand, always arouses his indignation ; and he has Cudworth’s dislike for the philosophy of Hobbes. Hobbes practically denies the existence of virtue, since he assumes that virtue is defined by law, and law grounded on self-interest. Traherne, after admitting that self-love is the bottom rung of the ladder which leads to Heaven, bursts out :—

“ It is a great mistake in that arrogant Leviathan so far to imprison our love to ourselves as to make it inconsistent with charity towards others. It is easy to manifest that it is impossible to love ourselves without loving other things. . . . Does not the man deserve to be burnt as an enemy to all the world that would turn all men into knaves and cowards, and destroy that only principle which delivers them from being mercenary slaves and villains, which is the love of others ? ”

In the “Christian Ethics” Traherne is the idealist rather than the mystic. It is true that his mysticism reveals itself every now and then in wonderful sayings such as : “There is a certain kind of sympathy which runs through the universe by which all men are fed in the feeding of one : even the angels are clothed in the poor and needy”, or “The same wisdom which created the

world is the only light in which it is enjoyed." But on the whole Traherne has excluded from the "Ethics" all that mystical rapture which we peculiarly associate with him, and he has thereby excluded his genius. It is rapture which lifts the prose of the "Centuries of Meditations" into sheer poetry. The style of the "Christian Ethics" is on a much lower level, though Traherne expresses himself clearly and forcibly, and his sentences are always melodious and well-balanced. It is good prose, but uninspired. Occasionally, however, when he becomes carried away by his theme, he rises to the rhythmic and imaginative language of the "Centuries", as in the following passage on "Goodness" :—

"To show that there is such a goodness as that which infinitely delights in pouring out its glory upon all creatures, the sun was made, which continues, night and day, pouring out its streams of light and heat upon all ages, yet is as glorious this day as it was the first moment of its creation. To show this, the stars were made, that shine in their watches and glitter in their motions, only to serve us. The moon was made to show this goodness, which runs her race for ever to serve us. The earth was made to support us; springs and rivers expend their streams to revive us. Fruits and flowers and herbs and trees delight us. All corruptible things waste and consume away, that they may sacrifice their essence to our benefit."

This ecstatic joy at the wonders of Creation is the prevailing mood in the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God." In the "Christian Ethics" Traherne sets out to teach, not to praise; in the "Contemplation" we have a series of "thanks-givings" which were probably written without any thought of publication, being evidently intended as "song-offerings" to God. They were published in 1699—that is, twenty-five years after Traherne's death—by Dr. Hickes "at the request of a friend of the author's." To Dr. Hickes, who was himself a theologian, we probably owe the somewhat long-winded title, "A Serious and

Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in several most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the Same." Traherne seems to have modelled these songs of praise on the Psalms : in the "Thanksgiving for the Body" he cries out :—

"O that I were as David, the sweet singer of Israel,
In meeter psalms to set forth Thy praises !"

Quotations from the Psalms and Biblical phrases are interwoven into the "Thanksgivings"; and Traherne evidently has the definite intention of reproducing the unmetrical poetry of the Psalms and prophetic books. He divides his rhythmic prose into lines of varying length after the manner of modern "vers libres" :—

"By the fall of some, we know, O Lord
That the Angels were tried,
Which are invisible spirits,
Needing not the world,
Nor clothed in bodies,
Nor endued with senses.
For our bodies therefore, O Lord, for our glorious
bodies, hast Thou made the world
Which Thou so lovest, that Thou hast supremely
magnified them by the works of Thy hands,
And made them Lords of all Creation.
Higher than the Heavens,
Because served by them,
More glorious than the sun,
Because it ministreth to them.
Greater in dignity than the material world,
Because the end of its creation."

Traherne employs a similar arrangement in some of the private devotions contained in the small manuscript volume which Bertram Dobell discovered in Dr. Grosart's library. This MS. is now in the possession of Mr. Percy Dobell, and has never been published. Though not of much literary value in itself, it forms an interesting parallel to the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation." It seems probable that Traherne

divided his prayers and thanksgivings into rhythmic lines because he meant them to be chanted, for he does not adopt the arrangement in the poetical passages of his other prose work. Many critics have pronounced Traherne's "Contemplation" to be a remarkable forerunner of the work of Walt Whitman. But it would be just as easy to find points of similarity between the two writers in the "Centuries of Meditations", which has an even higher claim to rank as unmetrical poetry. It is not division into lines or paragraphs which makes the difference between "vers libres" and ordinary prose. Indeed, the arrangement of the lines in the "Contemplation" sometimes seems purely arbitrary, according neither with sense nor rhythm—for instance :—

" O Thou Who art a consuming fire !
Whose love is compared to everlasting
Burnings : the delight which Thou takest in our
happiness was always satisfied."

Such passages may perhaps be due to an error in copying or printing. But there are moments when Traherne becomes prosaic in the worst sense of the word, as when he thanks God that men provide for him :—

" My household stuff, books, utensils, furniture,
The use of meats, fire, fuel, etcetera."

Surely an honest and unprejudiced reader must admit that if passages of this kind were not divided into lines, he would merely regard them as ordinary prose, not because metre is lacking, but because there is not that harmony between language, thought, and rhythm, which makes poetry. Bertram Dobell, comparing the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation" with "Leaves of Grass", mentions the "frequent passages in which the author enumerates or catalogues, as the American poet does, every object he can think of which bears any relation to his theme." This habit is, indeed, one of Traherne's besetting sins, not only in the "Contemplation", but in all his works. The trick of "cataloguing" is a fault

in any writer, but more particularly in a poet : it merely deadens the sense of the reader, who cannot fit the meaning of the author to a dozen objects at once. Traherne spoils some of his best passages in the "Contemplation" with strings of words in opposition to each other :—

"Let the miraculous excellency of His eternal love
Open the Gate of Wonder, Liberty, Difficulty to me,
The Gate of Glory, Triumph, Invincible Peace, Unchange-
able Goodness, Beauty and Delight,
By teaching me to love, as He loveth,
The souls of men,
Of the worst of men,
More than myself ;
Though the more I love
The less I be loved."

Traherne means something by every one of the names he gives to the "Gate"; and he subsequently explains his meaning. But the long list of abstract qualities is undoubtedly an artistic fault.

The "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation" contains, however, much genuine poetry. The "Thanksgiving for God's Attributes" is particularly beautiful. Traherne divides it into longer lines than usual, and the long line suits his style better. He breaks into a wonderful hymn of adoring love, which reminds one of the "song-offerings" of Rabindranath Tagore. The two poets have, indeed, much in common.

"Such is the glory of Thy exquisite presence, that it is at once wholly in millions of persons—

Wholly in them all, like the sun in a mirror, in a thousand thousand mirrors, that maketh by its beams the Heavens also to be present there ;

And me like a mirror the entire possessor of all Thy glories.
Most really, O Lord, are they all within me, because Thou art really dwelling there.

Even thou, my Sun, Who with all Thy Kingdom art dwelling there."

.

'Tis I, O Lord, was an object of Thy love from everlasting.
Thou intimately knowest me, and wast acquainted with me
from all eternity.

In myself I am finite; but the infinity of Thy glory maketh
everything infinite upon which Thou lookest."

We do not meet with any new aspect of Traherne's thought in the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation." His object is not to expound his mystical philosophy, but to express his love. The last "Thanksgiving" closes with the prayer :—

"Give me wide and public affections,
So strong to each as if I loved him alone.
Make me a blessing to all the kingdom,
A peculiar treasure, after Thy similitude, to every soul,
Especially to those whom Thou hast given me by love,
Make me a shining light, a golden candlestick."

In the "Ethics " we see Traherne as the teacher of a "Divine philosophy" : in the "Contemplation" we see him as a man who loved God and mankind with all his strength, and yet was ever desiring a greater capacity to love, for nothing less than infinite love could content him.

VI.

If Traherne had only written his poems and those prose works which were published during the seventeenth century, we should probably consider him an interesting and original thinker, but hardly a writer of genius. His claim to immortality rests on the prose manuscript preserved for us by Mr. Brooke's happy discovery, the manuscript which Traherne himself entitled || "Centuries of Meditations."

Traherne wrote the "Meditations" for a friend; possibly, Mr. Bell suggests, for Susan, the wife of Philip Traherne, but that is only an hypothesis. The first page of the manuscript bears the inscription:—

" This book unto the friend of my best friend,
As of the wisest Love a mark I send,
That she may write my Maker's praise therein,
And make herself thereby a Cherubim."

It is, however, Traherne himself who has written his "Maker's praise" in the book—evidently at the request of the friend to whom he sent it; for his first words are: "An empty book is like an infant's soul, in which anything may be written. It is capable of all things, but containeth nothing. I have a mind to fill this with profitable wonders. And since Love made you put it into my hands, I will fill it with those Truths you love without knowing them."

The work is divided into "Centuries", or sections of a hundred paragraphs. The fifth and last "Century" breaks off abruptly at the tenth paragraph; and Bertram Dobell infers that Traherne was prevented from completing it by his death. He may, indeed, have intended

to write more than five "Centuries", for there is plenty of blank space still left in the manuscript.

Traherne writes the "Centuries of Meditations" in order to lead his friend to the "felicity" he himself has found. In no other work has he expressed his sublime creed so fully and perfectly. Moreover, in the third and fourth "Centuries", to illustrate his teaching, he gives an account of his own search after Truth. These autobiographical sections are very beautiful as literature, and we value them all the more because we can gather so little information about Traherne's life from other sources. The "Centuries" do not, indeed, add much to our knowledge of his outward circumstances: we gather, from chance remarks, that he was brought up in poor surroundings, that he went to the University (which we already knew from Wood), and that after leaving College he chose a life of poverty of his own free will. He gives no dates, no names of people or places: probably his friend was already acquainted with these bare facts; and in any case Traherne had no need to tell her of his outer life, since his mystical doctrine was concerned with the life of the spirit. We cannot tell what he did from the "Centuries", or what happened to him; but we can tell what he thought, what he felt, what he was. We gained from the "Poems" some vague idea of his development from childhood to manhood: here he repeats the same story, but more coherently, more vividly, making it live for us in such a way that we cannot doubt its truth.

The third "Century" opens with a very beautiful description of those "pure and virgin apprehensions" of infancy which form the chief subject of the "Poems." Here, however, Traherne does not linger long with that early period of innocence, but quickly passes to the time when his "first light" was "totally eclipsed" through the influence of his surroundings:—

"All men's thoughts and words were about other matters. They all prized new things which I did not dream of.

I was a stranger, and unacquainted with them : I was little, and revered their authority : I was weak, and easily guided by their example ; ambitious also, and desirous to approve myself unto them."

First of all he had loved the glorious works of Nature : now he cared only for drums and hobby-horses. Yet these new treasures could not satisfy him : he was not happy, for the world had become meaningless to him, and he seemed to be living amongst "dreams and shadows" :—

"A comfortless wilderness full of thorns and troubles the world was, or worse ; a waste place covered with idleness, and play, and shops, and markets, and taverns. As for Churches, they were things I did not understand, and schools were a burden ; so that there was nothing in the world worth the having or enjoying but my game and sport, which also was a dream, and being passed wholly forgotten."

Very few grown-up people realise that a child hungers as much for an explanation of life as they do themselves. The child's craving is naturally far more vague and inarticulate : he wants he knows not what, and even if he knew he could not make his elders understand : consequently they are apt to take it for granted that his little mind is wholly occupied with his "game and sport." Instinctively he seeks satisfaction in the religious teaching offered him by his parents : he accepts it with implicit faith ; but as often as not it is either incomprehensible to him or contrary to his own innate sense of right and wrong ; and so it brings no solution to his childish difficulties. Traherne did not fare any better than the majority of children : evidently his parents did not understand him and could give him no help. His mind was filled with "obstinate questionings", which he, like Wordsworth, remembered with gratitude later in life. One of the first problems which perplexed him was, why a beneficent God should not have made him rich ? :—

“ Once I remember (I think I was about four years old at the time) I thus reasoned with myself, sitting in a little obscure room in my father’s poor house : if there be a God, certainly He must be infinite in Goodness ; and that I was prompted to, by a real whispering instinct of Nature. And if He be infinite in goodness, certainly He must do most glorious things, and give us infinite riches : how comes it to pass therefore that I am so poor ? ”

Traherne must be under-estimating his age here ; for otherwise the period of glorious innocence which preceded that of doubt would be beyond the reach of his memory. In the poem “Dumbness”, indeed, he seems to assume that he had his divine intuitions before he could speak ; in which case he would hardly have been able to recollect them. These inaccuracies do not, however, cast any slur on the veracity of his narrative. We can very seldom remember the exact age at which we were thinking certain thoughts ; and if most of us would make a better guess than Traherne, it is only because we have a more extensive acquaintance with small children than he probably had.

However, whether Traherne was four or older when he began to ponder on the problems of life, it is evident that he was a child with an unusually thoughtful and enquiring mind. His desire for knowledge was insatiable :—

“ Sometimes I should soar above the stars, and enquire how the Heavens ended, and what was beyond them ? . . . Sometimes my thoughts would carry me to the Creation, for I had heard now that the world, which at first I thought was eternal, had a beginning ; how, therefore, that beginning was, and why it was, why it was no sooner, and what was before, I mightily desired to know.”

He had, too, a vivid imagination : he loved to hear of “any new kingdom beyond the seas”, or to have the Bible read to him ; for then he “saw and felt all in such a lively manner, as if there had been no other way to those places, but in spirit only.” And always he was

filled with the expectation of some unknown happiness which should befall him, so that he received any piece of news with "greediness and delight", hoping that it contained the secret of his good fortune ; but after he had heard it, he was disappointed. As he grew older he found in the Bible the glad tidings he longed for ; but he still did not understand them perfectly, and it was not till after he had left the University that the true source of all "felicity" was revealed to him.

The University itself helped him in his progress towards happiness :—

" There I saw into the nature of the sea, the heavens, the sun, the moon and stars, the elements, minerals and vegetables ; all which appeared like the King's daughter, all glorious within ; and those things which my nurses and parents should have talked of, these were taught unto me."

Yet something was lacking, for :—

" There was never a tutor that did professly teach Felicity, though that be mistress of all other sciences. Nor did any of us study these things but as *aliena*, which we ought to have studied as enjoyments. We studied to inform our knowledge, and knew not to what end we studied. Howbeit, there we received all those seeds of knowledge that were afterward improved."

Every branch of knowledge, Traherne thinks, leads us a step further in our journey to Truth, provided we study in the right way, and not superficially or pedantically. His time at Oxford partially opened his eyes to the glory of the world, and when he left the University he made his great decision not to rest until he had found "Felicity."

" When I came into the country, and, being seated among silent trees and meads and hills, had all my time in my own hands, I resolved to spend it all, whatever it cost me, in the search of happiness, and to satiate that burning thirst which Nature had enkindled in me from my youth. In which I was so resolute that I chose rather to live upon £10 a year, and to go in leather clothes, and feed upon bread

and water, so that I might have all my time clearly to myself, than to keep many thousand per annum in an estate of life where my time would be devoured in care and labour. And God was so pleased to accept of that desire that from that time to this I have had all things plentifully prepared for me, without any care at all, my very study of Felicity making me more to prosper than all the care in the whole world."

At first, indeed, he could not help wishing that he had riches to give to others; but fearing that this might lead him to covetousness he came to the conclusion that sometimes "to condemn the world in the whole lump was as acceptable to God as first to get it with solicitude and care, and then to retail it out in particular charity"; and he consoled himself with the reflection that wealth was no more necessary to his friends' happiness than to his own. He had other difficulties to overcome: he soon found that a little knowledge of "Felicity" was of no avail, and much knowledge could not be gained without much labour. Moreover, his quest was a lonely one: most men had not the patience and courage to pursue it; and he had to tell himself "It is a good thing to be happy alone. It is better to be happy in company, but good to be happy alone." He persevered in his search till at last he was rewarded by the great discovery: "Every creature is, indeed, as it seemed in my infancy, not as it is commonly apprehended. Everything being sublimely rich and great and glorious." After this he found it easy to be happy and to love God and all creation. He realised that if anything seemed amiss he must seek the fault in his own heart, for all other things were well. Often, he admits, his practice fell short of the "glorious principles" he had gained, but he "repented deeply every miscarriage; and, moreover, firmly resolved as much as was possible never to err or wander from them again."

From this narrative it is easy to see that Traherne's mysticism was not a set of ideas received purely from outside sources, but an integral part of himself. The

seeds of it were in him in his earliest childhood, though their growth was undoubtedly fostered by the general mystical tendency of his age. He probably came into touch with theologians of the Platonic school at Oxford, and learned to love the works of the Neo-Platonists : he sometimes quotes from the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, which were greatly revered in the seventeenth century. But Traherne is always a little suspicious of any philosophy which is not definitely Christian : he uses it to corroborate, not to influence, his own thought. The Bible seems to him the only true authority on spiritual matters; yet it cannot be called the source of his mysticism, for it is all things to all men : it inspired the Puritans of the seventeenth century as well as the mystics. Of the traditional expressions of mysticism, Traherne makes little use : he tries to explain his ideas and feelings by a mixture of Biblical language and a vocabulary of his own. For instance, most mystics speak of "union with God" or "re-birth" as the one thing desirable ; Traherne calls it simply "Felicity"; yet he undoubtedly means the same thing. His independence makes it difficult to classify his mysticism under any of the usual headings. Miss Spurgeon calls him a "philosophical mystic"; while Mrs. Herman thinks he forms a link between the "love-mystics" and the "nature-mystics." In the "Centuries" we see him in all these aspects. He is certainly a philosopher : it is equally true that he sees God in Nature ; but both his philosophy and his view of Nature spring from a deep-rooted conviction of God's infinite love. In a way, therefore, we may most appropriately call him a "love-mystic", though not in the ordinary sense of the word, for the name is generally applied to those who express their mysticism in the language of human passion—a language by no means characteristic of Traherne. He never uses the erotic symbolism we find in Crashaw and many other Roman Catholic mystics. Nor does he, like Donne and Herbert, address his God as he might a

dearly-loved earthly friend. Even at his most personal—as in the *Meditations on the Cross*—his language has a Biblical colouring which robs it of realism :—

“ O let me leave Kings’ courts to come unto Thee : I choose rather in a cave to serve Thee than on a throne to despise Thee. O my dying gracious Lord, I perceive the virtue of Thy passion everywhere : let it, I beseech Thee, enter into my soul, and rend my rocky, stony heart, and tear the veil of my flesh, that I may see into the Holy of Holies! . . . Thou wast slain for me; and shall I leave Thy Body in the field, O Lord ? Shall I go away and be merry, while the Love of my soul, and my only Lover, is dead upon the Cross ? ”

Here, indeed, we have passionate adoration, but it does not speak with the accents of earthly love. Nor is Traherne generally even so direct and personal as this. But he bases his whole philosophy on the creed which distinguishes all love-mystics—that God is Love and man His beloved.

Traherne interprets all the doctrines of his Church in terms of love. The dogma of the Trinity had gained a new and beautiful significance to the seventeenth century mystics through the analogy of Neo-Platonic philosophy. So, too, Traherne gives this mystery a deep spiritual meaning. God, he says, is the Lover : Christ is God’s Love, becoming “in act, what it was in power”, passing from Him to us : the Holy Spirit is the Love of God resting on man, His beloved. To realise God’s Love and return it to the utmost of our power, is, to Traherne, “Felicity”, the whole end of existence. Yet we must not imagine that we can love God without loving man and all the world : “Were He beloved alone, His love would be limited. He must be loved in all with an unlimited love, even in all His doings, in all His friends, in all His creatures.” We should love men next after God with a love so great that we would willingly give our lives for them. To concentrate all our affection

on one person will not suffice, not because our love for anyone can be too great, but because we should have room in our hearts for more than one :—

“Suppose a curious and fair woman. Some have seen the beauties of Heaven in such a person. It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. . . . They love her perhaps, but do not love God more, nor men as much, nor Heaven and earth at all. . . . I dare confidently say that every person in the whole world ought to be beloved as much as this, and she, if there be any cause of difference, more than she is.”

Traherne's curious attitude towards Hell stands in apparent contradiction to his creed of universal love. Bertram Dobell, on reading the “Centuries” for the first time, was filled “with a sensation no less of grief than of astonishment” by the passage :—

“Hell itself is a part of God's kingdom, to wit, His prison. It is fitly mentioned in the enjoyment of the world, and is itself, by the happy, enjoyed as a part of the world.”

There is nothing to justify Dobell's assertion that Traherne here alludes to a “material hell.” On the contrary, the previous paragraph tells us, “To have blessings and to prize them is to be in Heaven. . . . To prize them and not to have them is to be in Hell”; and elsewhere in the “Centuries” Traherne declares that one cannot gain Heaven by change of place : “An angel will be happy anywhere, and a devil miserable, because the principles of the one are good, of the other bad.” He undoubtedly believed that Heaven and Hell are within us. But, though he had no childish and materialistic conception of Hell as a fiery furnace, he certainly thought that the wicked would be punished eternally : “They that would not upon earth see their wants from all Eternity, shall in Hell see their treasures to all Eternity. Wants here may be seen and enjoyed : enjoyments there shall be seen, but wanted.” And more than once

he declares that the blessed may draw happiness from the torments of the damned, which seems, indeed, as Dobell says, an inhuman belief.

How Traherne could conceive of a loving God punishing His enemies for all eternity, passes the understanding. But we must remember that disbelief in Hell would have been regarded as heresy in the seventeenth century, and Traherne was a staunch Churchman. Even Sir Thomas Browne felt himself obliged to believe in everlasting damnation, though it sorely troubled his kind heart : he imagined it to be a vital part of the Anglican faith, and humbly assumed that his natural repugnance to the idea was due to lack of wisdom. So, too, Traherne accepts the dogmas of his Church with unquestioning faith, and fits them into his philosophy of life as best he can.

Once Traherne had taken the existence of Hell for granted, we cannot be surprised at his assertion that it "is itself by the happy enjoyed, as a part of the world." This is, after all, only consistent with the belief that God is perfect Love, and everything save sin emanates from Him; and therefore, "all things are well." Some mystics look upon wickedness itself as a part of God's harmony, and therefore a cause for rejoicing. Traherne does not go as far as this : he says that sin comes from man, not God, and is "the only ill." But Hell he considers a part of God's dispensation, and consequently an object of enjoyment; for everything that God has made proceeds from perfect wisdom and love.

How far Traherne was from recommending a malicious and Pharisaical joy in the punishment of the wicked we can see from the poem "On Meekness" in the "Christian Ethics." Here he writes not of the damned, but of the sinners on earth, and for a moment we are shocked by his declaration that their "dismal woes" add to his own peace; but soon afterwards we find that we must not take his words too literally, for he longs for the redemption of the wicked ;—

“What would we give ! that these might likewise see
The glory of His Majesty,
The joy and fulness of that high delight
Whose blessedness is infinite !
We would even cease to live, to gain
Them from their misery and pain.”

If one really took pleasure in the pain of others, one would hardly die to save them from it. With Traherne, unselfish devotion to mankind was the highest duty after love for God ; but where the two seemed to him to come into conflict he placed God first.

Similarly he looks upon love for man as more important than love for the rest of creation, for man is made in God's image. But, if we would be perfect, we should love all things. For God's spirit pervades the whole universe : it is His visible body : in it He has revealed Himself to our eyes. In this belief Traherne resembles Vaughan ; but whereas Vaughan looks upon the physical facts of Nature as symbolic of eternal truth, Traherne finds truth in the facts themselves. Symbolism is foreign to him : he seldom speaks in parables. Everything created, he says, has its service to perform for man, and therefore it is expressive of God's love, and a part of the great world-harmony :—

“Suppose a river, or a drop of water, an apple, or a sand, an ear of corn, or an herb : God knoweth infinite excellencies in it more than we. He seeth how it relateth to angels and men, how it proceedeth from the most perfect Lover to the most perfectly Beloved ; how it representeth all His attributes ; how it conduceth in its place by the best of means to the best of ends, and for this cause it cannot be beloved too much. . . . O what a treasure is every sand when truly understood ! ”

Though Traherne feels the essential unity of all Nature as the Cambridge Platonists did, he does not, like Vaughan, imagine all creatures longing with man for the day of redemption. He feels no bond of sympathy between himself and Nature, but he loves her

because she is beautiful, and because she ministers to mankind. For man alone she was created, he tells us ; yet we, in our ingratitude, do not value our greatest treasures, but seek after gold and jewels instead of loving the sun. What would our gold profit us if we had no sun ? :—

“ Suppose the sun were absent, and conceive the world to be a dungeon of darkness and death about you, you will then find his beams more delightful than the approach of the angels, and loathe the abomination of that sinful blindness whereby you see not the glory of so great and bright a creature because the air is filled with its beams. . . . It raiseth corn to supply you with food : it melteth waters to quench your thirst : it infuseth sense into all your members : it illuminates the world to entertain you with prospects : it surroundeth you with the beauty of hills and valleys. It moveth and laboureth night and day for your comfort and service : it sprinkleth flowers upon the ground for your pleasure ; and in all these things sheweth you the goodness and wisdom of a God that can make one thing so beautiful, delightful, and serviceable, having ordained the same to innumerable ends.”

Traherne constantly points out that the “obvious and common things” are the most glorious. God, in His goodness, has given sun, earth, air, sky, and sea to all men, and until we love them we cannot be truly happy.

There are, then, three things necessary to “felicity”—love for God, love for man, love for nature ; and when at last we have found “felicity”, we shall be “turned and converted into Love, a universal sun”, and “become one spirit with God.”

This beautiful creed underlies all Traherne’s work, but attains its highest expression in the “Centuries of Meditations.” Not that he develops it in a more lucid and orderly manner here than elsewhere : on the contrary, he makes no attempt at a systematic exposition of his subject, as he does in the “Christian Ethics”, nor do we find here anything approaching the purposeful arrangement of the “Poems.” But the “Centuries” are

Traherne's greatest achievement, because in them thought and language are perfectly blended.

If we compare Traherne's poems of infancy with the account of his childhood given in the "Centuries", we can see at once the superiority of his best prose to his best verse. In the poem "Wonder" he thus describes the world as it first appeared to him :—

"The streets were paved with golden stones,
The boys and girls were mine,
O how did all their lovely faces shine !
The sons of men were holy ones,
In joy and beauty they appeared to me,
And everything which here I found,
While like an angel I did see,
Adorned the ground.

Rich diamond and pearl and gold
In every place were seen :
Rare splendours, yellow, blue, red, white and green,
Mine eyes did everywhere behold.
Great wonders clothed with glory did appear :
Amazement was my bliss :
That and my wealth was everywhere,
No joy to this.

Proprieties themselves were mine ;
And hedges, ornaments,
Walls, boxes, coffers, and their rich contents
Did not divide my joys, but all combine.
Clothes, ribbons, jewels, laces, I esteemed
My joys by others worn :
For me they all to wear them seemed
When I was born."

This is one of Traherne's best poems. Too often he tries to convey his ideas in abstract terms, which are almost always fatal to poetry, but in "Wonder" we have a wealth of concrete words, giving life and colour to the verse. Yet the signs of obvious effort in lines such as "Oh how did all their lovely faces shine!" and "Mine eyes did everywhere behold" weaken the poetic impression.

We perceive at once that Traherne says "did shine", "did behold", because "shone" and "beheld" would not have rhymed, and the human mind is so constituted that it cannot be in perfect sympathy with an artist unless he have full command of his medium. He must seem to produce his effect without any labour, otherwise we instinctively suspect him—however unjustly—of artificiality. We might possibly conceive of "Wonder" having been written by a poet who had had no personal experience of the feelings he describes. But the beautiful parallel passage in the "Centuries" convinces us of Traherne's sincerity, because the language seems to grow naturally out of the emotion, and consequently we are sure that the emotion itself is genuine :—

"The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold : the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees, when I saw them first through one of the gates, transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The men ! O what venerable and reverent creatures did the aged seem ! Immortal cherubims ! and young men glittering and sparkling angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty ! Boys and girls tumbling in the street and playing were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die, but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the light of the day, and something infinite behind everything appeared, which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins, and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine, and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it."

Here there is no clumsy artifice to come between us

and the author ; he carries us away by the rush of his imagination till we gain a momentary glimpse of his own "vision splendid", and dimly remember a time when for us, too, "something infinite behind everything appeared." The child, like the artist or the mystic, has a faculty for seeing all things abiding eternally in their proper places, but with the child the gift is instinctive and unconscious, and, as soon as it is lost, entirely forgotten. In some cases the artist or mystic, regaining the faculty, remembers having had it before ; but the majority of us would never remember if he did not remind us ; and even then the recollection he awakens is so vague and indefinite that we could never have given voice to it ourselves.

The "Centuries" not only convey Traherne's "early apprehensions" to us much better than the poems, but they also make his childhood seem more real to us. The poems give us only a vague general impression : the "Centuries", without relating anything in detail, call up a series of vivid little pictures into our mind. We can see the small boy peering through the gates "which were at first the end of the world", and discovering the wonderful green trees beyond. We can see him sitting in the "little obscure room" in his father's "poor house", pondering already on life's problems. We can see him standing alone in the field, suddenly realising with horror his own solitude, and feeling himself deserted of all mankind. But when Traherne describes some of these incidents in the poems, he loses the truth of the pictures. The poem "Solitude" opens with the verse :—

" How desolate !

Ah ! how forlorn, how sadly did I stand

When in the field my woeful state

I felt ! Not all the land,

Not all the skies,

Though Heaven shined before my eyes,

Could comfort yield in any field to me,

Nor could my mind contentment find or see."

Here Traherne, being restricted by his versification, expresses himself to a certain extent artificially, and we must turn to the description in the "Centuries" if we are to realise his happy gift for portraying the feelings of childhood :—

" Another time, in a lowering and sad evening, being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain want and horror fell upon me, beyond imagination. The unprofitableness and silence of the place dissatisfied me : its wideness terrified me : from the utmost ends of the earth fears surrounded me. How did I know but dangers might suddenly arise from the East and invade me from the unknown regions beyond the seas ? I was a weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the earth."

There can be no doubt that Traherne's genius lay in the direction of prose, and his finest prose is to be found in the "Centuries." There are some beautiful passages in the "Serious and Pathetical Contemplation"; but, on the whole, it falls far below the sublimity of the "Centuries", because the form of the rhythmic chant impedes rather than helps Traherne's naturally flowing and musical style. In the "Christian Ethics" we find a clear, well-balanced, dignified prose, unspoilt by attempts at metrical arrangements; yet it lacks passion, and in the "Centuries" passion is the philosopher's stone which transmutes this solid metal to pure gold.

The following extract from the chapter on "Love" in the "Ethics" is fairly representative of the general style :—

" The very sun is not more inclined to communicate its beams than the soul to love. For the soul being made in the image of God, Who is Love by His essence, must needs be like Him in power and inclination, and is made for nothing else but the attainment of its perfection, for that it can never rest until it love after His similitude."

Here we have a fine thought, expressed with dignity and sincerity; but the "Centuries" utter the same idea—

that we should love as God loves—with the added force of passion :—

“ God is present by love alone. By love alone He is great and glorious. By love alone He liveth and feeleth in other persons. By love alone He enjoyeth all the creatures. By love alone He is pleasing to Himself. By love alone He is rich and blessed. O why dost not thou by love alone seek to achieve all these ; by love alone attain another self ; by love alone live in others ; by love attain thy glory ? The soul is shrivelled up and buried in a grave, that does not love.”

In the first passage, thought is paramount ; in the second, passion arising from thought, which always produces a deeper impression than thought itself. Passion makes itself evident in the increased music of the language—in the melody of the words, the rhythmical sentences, and the repetition of the refrain “by love alone.”

The skilful use of rhythm and repetition characterises all Traherne's finest prose passages. The beautiful paragraph beginning “The corn was orient and immortal wheat” is exquisitely musical, and the frequent reiteration of the word “mine” in the latter part adds to the music. We find Traherne's rhythmic prose in its highest perfection in the chain of paragraphs in the “First Century” on the enjoyment of the world. To quote the whole series would take too long ; but a part will show how he carries on the music from paragraph to paragraph, and adds to its beauty by skilful variation of the refrain :—

“ Your enjoyment of the world is never right till every morning you awake in Heaven—see yourself in your Father's palace, and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as celestial joys, having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the angels. The bride of a monarch in her husband's chamber hath no such causes of delight as you.

“ You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars, and perceive yourself to be sole

heir of the whole world; and more than so, because men are in it who are everyone sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world.

“Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all ages as with your walk and table; till you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made; till you love men so as to desire their happiness with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own; till you delight in God for being good to all, you never enjoy the world. Till you more feel it than your private estate, and are more present in the hemisphere considering the glories and beauties there, than in your own house; till you remember how lately you were made, and how wonderful it was when you came into it; and more rejoice in the palace of your glory than if it had been made but to-day morning.”

Surely, if poetry can be written without metre, this is poetry. In the passage “God is present by love alone”, we had music; here we have both music and imagery. Traherne’s illustrations and metaphors are always very simple, but very effective in their simplicity. He generally draws them from precious metals and jewels, or from those “obvious and common things” he loved so well—the sun, the sea, the stars, the fields, the trees. Through this limited choice of objects his comparisons naturally lack variety—over and over again he likens the human soul to a jewel, or universal love to the sun pouring out its beams upon all creatures. Yet we can forgive Traherne for his monotony, since the very nature of his constantly recurring images gives a certain aggregate sublimity to his prose. He uses words which meant a great deal to him, and he makes them mean a great deal to us too. As objects, indeed, gold and silver and rubies were nothing to him; but as words, they had a very different value, through their frequent use in the poetical books of the Old Testament to symbolise all that is precious. For us, too, these words are invested with a glamour out of all proportion to what they denote,

a glamour which they have gained simply through traditional association. As for the other sources from which Traherne borrows his imagery, his beloved "obvious and common things" are in themselves glorious, but all the more so when we look at them through his eyes. The mere mention of them in his work gives an impression of vastness and splendour; and whence could he draw illustrations more fitting for his transcendental themes?

But the root of Traherne's sublimity in the "Centuries" cannot be found by mere analysis of his prose. In the end we can only judge whether a writer be sublime or not by our own feelings when we read him. "For, as if instinctively, our soul is uplifted by the true sublime", says Longinus, "it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard." Where we find a great thought greatly expressed, for the moment we lose our identity completely in the artist's; but exactly how he has produced this effect upon us, we cannot tell. Take Traherne's saying:—"No man can sin that clearly seeth the beauty of God's face"—or the magnificent passage: "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars." This is sublimity, but we do not know how Traherne has achieved it; for the mysterious connection between the order of words, the sound of words, the meaning of words, and the impression they convey baffles explanation.

To write sublimely, a man must have both greatness of character and genius. For he must be great in himself to think greatly, and he must be a genius to convey the sublimity of his thought to others. Traherne was not always a genius: he has uninspired moments even in the "Centuries." But because he sometimes attains sublimity of expression, we realise that his great thoughts are really an essential part of himself, and that he must have been a truly great man.

Surely posterity will confirm the judgment of the present generation, and place Traherne among the immortals ; and so through the long-delayed discovery of his works his most heartfelt wishes will be granted :—

“ It was your friend’s delight to meditate the principles of upright nature, and to see how things stood in Paradise before they were muddled and blended and confounded. For now they are lost and buried in ruins, nothing appearing but fragments that are worthless shreds and parcels of them. . . . It was his desire to recover them and to exhibit them again to the eyes of men.”

For he tells us :—

“ If he might have had but one request of God Almighty, it should have been above all other that he might be a blessing to mankind.”

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